



# The City of Morgantown

389 Spruce Street  
Morgantown, WV 26505  
[www.morgantownwv.gov](http://www.morgantownwv.gov)

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## City of Morgantown Media Relations Policy

### GOAL:

The City of Morgantown seeks to inform its residents, businesses and visitors by engaging in a pro-active communications program. This program recognizes that one of the most effective and quickest ways to communicate City policies and activities to citizens is by working in partnership with the news media.

### POLICY:

Inquiries from the news media are given a high priority by the City of Morgantown and should be responded to as quickly and efficiently as possible. Every effort should be made to meet media deadlines and to ensure that all information released is accurate.

The Public Communications Office is responsible for the City's media relations, with the exception of most public safety issues. All City employees should notify the Public Communications Office (which includes the Public Communications Manager) about media inquiries. The majority of City media requests are initiated when the media contacts the Public Communications Office. Because the media often works on tight deadlines, it is important that all departments respond as soon as possible when the Office of Communications requests department information or a spokesperson for the media. Specific guidelines for responding to media requests follow.

All press releases and new items will be approved by the City Manager or Assistant City Manager.

### CITY SPOKESPERSONS:

Unless otherwise authorized by the City Manager or Assistant City Manager, the City's spokespersons are:

- Mayor and City Council members
- City Manager and Assistant City Manager of Operations
- City Attorney, City Clerk
- Department Heads and Assistant Department Heads
- Public Communications Office/Public Communications Manager

- Police Department and Fire Department Public Information Officers (Police and Fire have specific media policies that govern their procedures)
- Exceptions regarding departmental spokespersons may be made at the discretion of the Department Head.

## **MEDIA INQUIRIES:**

Any media inquiries received by other City staff should be referred immediately to the Office of Communications and their Department Head/ Assistant Department Head. An appropriate response to the media would be, "I'm sorry I don't have the full information regarding that issue. I will give your request to my Department Director (or the City's Public Communications Manager) who will respond to you as soon as he/she is available." Please obtain the reporter's name, phone number (cell, too, if "in the field"), topic of story and deadline.



Any department Head may speak as representative of the City if they intend to backbrief the City Manager or Assistant City Manager in a timely manner afterwards.

## **SENSITIVE OR CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES:**

All television, radio, newspaper or other media inquiries regarding sensitive or controversial issues should always be referred immediately to the Office of Communications and the employee's Department Head or Assistant Department Head. Communications staff will contact the City Manager's Office and coordinate a response including designating a spokesperson after consultation with the City Manager's Office and the appropriate Department.

## **LITIGATION, PERSONNEL AND ELECTION ISSUES:**

Generally, the business conducted by the City of Morgantown is public, and therefore, is public information. Inquiries regarding pending litigation, matters involving a significant exposure to litigation and certain personnel-related information are exceptions. All requests for information from the media should be relayed to the Public Communications office, even if no action is required from it regarding the information request. This way, we can be aware and track of what messages we are sharing with the media.

Inquiries regarding pending litigation or exposure to litigation should be referred to the City Attorney's Office. Inquiries regarding personnel-related information should be referred to the Human Resources Department. The Attorney or HR Dept. Head can respond accordingly.

Inquiries regarding election and campaign issues should be referred to the City Clerk or Assistant City Clerk. The City Clerk will contact the City Manager's Office, City Attorney's Office and Office of Communications as and if appropriate.

## **PERSONAL POINTS OF VIEW**

It is recognized that all employees have the right to their personal points of view regarding any issue. However, personal points of view may conflict with the City's official policy. Therefore, City employees who write letters to the editor of any newspaper may not use official City stationary. An employee may not identify him- or herself as a City employee if they are conveying the employee's personally held opinion. The same guidelines apply if an employee addresses a public meeting, participates in a radio talk show, or is interviewed for a radio or television program unless the employee is officially representing the City. Employees who are representing the City in any of the above arenas are required to identify themselves as an official spokesperson for the City.

If an employee would still like to share his or her personal opinion and disclose their official title, they must receive permission from the City Manager or Assistant City manager

## **GENERAL OR ROUTINE ISSUES:**

Broadcast media: Calls from broadcast media (TV and radio) need not be referred immediately to the Public Communications Office, but should be relayed to the employee's Department Head or Assistant Department Head. Communications staff can assist in contacting the City Manager's Office and coordinate a response including designating a spokesperson after consultation with the City Manager's Office and the relevant Department.

Local print media: Calls from local print media regarding most departmental issues and programs may be handled by each department's Director or Assistant Director. On occasion the Director/Assistant Director may designate an employee in their department to respond to specific questions from print media. The Public Communications Office should be informed of these media requests---including the reporter and topic---either before or immediately following these interviews.

## **CITY-INITIATED INFORMATION:**

Most proactive media contact is initiated through the Office of Communications. This includes issuing press releases and media advisories, and personal contacts with reporters and editors for coverage.

As a rule of thumb, Morgantown City offices are open Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. with a lunch hour between 12 and 1 p.m. Most offices are closed during this time. These hours apply to the City Attorney's office, City Clerk's office, City Manager's office, Community Development and Public Works & Engineering. Finance and Code Enforcement are open 7 a.m. – 5 p.m. The heads of these departments do check their emails often, but a call first would be more effective. If no answer, a follow up email should do.

The Public Communications Office is open between the hours of 8 a.m. and 5 p.m., with the exception of the lunch hour. However, if the Manager is out of the office during this time, she's available by cell phone at 304-844-8908.

Marchetta Maupin in Urban Landscaping is often busy out in the field. The best way to get in touch with that office is to call during regular business hours and leave a message, or send an email.

### **PUBLIC SAFETY ISSUES:**



Because the Police and Fire Departments operate 24/7 and their work generates a high volume of media calls, those departments have designated sworn personnel as media spokespersons and follow specific guidelines when releasing information. Any media calls to other City staff regarding a Police or Fire issue should be referred immediately to the Police Department or Fire Department, as appropriate. All information released to the media by the Police and Fire

Departments should be provided immediately to the City Manager's Office and the Public Communications Office; and, when appropriate, those offices should be contacted at the time of major incidents.

Chief Ed Preston says he and his department are available for interviews Monday through Friday, during the day shift.

A day shift runs 7 a.m. to 3 p.m.

The afternoon shifts run 3 p.m. to 11 p.m.

Night shift is from 11 p.m. to 7 a.m.

Chief Preston said police officers will normally not be available on weekends due to low staffing. However, he welcomes shooting "save" or "hold" stories for the weekends, and is willing to tape multiple stories at once.

### **CRISIS OR EMERGENCY ISSUES:**

During a crisis or major emergency (i.e. earthquake), the procedure for handling the media is highlighted in the City's Emergency Plan. The plan designates the City's Public Communications Manager as the main point of contact for the media. The PCM is assisted by alternates including the Police and Fire Public Information Officers who prepare and disseminate emergency public information.